

SRI AUROBINDO

THE NATIONAL VALUE OF ART





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I

There is a tendency in modern times to depreciate the value of the beautiful and overstress the value of the useful, a tendency curbed in Europe by the imperious insistence of an agelong tradition of culture and generous training of the aesthetic perceptions; but in India, where we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition, it is corrected only by the stress of imagination, emotion and spiritual delicacy, submerged but not yet destroyed in the temperament of the people. The value attached by the

ancients to music, art and poetry has become almost unintelligible to an age bent on depriving life of its meaning by turning earth into a sort of glorified ant-heap or beehive and confusing the lowest, though most primary in necessity, of the means of human progress with the aim of this great evolutionary process. The first and lowest necessity of the race is that of self-preservation in the body by a sufficient supply and equable distribution of food, shelter and raiment. This is a problem which the oldest communistic human societies solved to perfection, and without communism it cannot be solved except by a convenient but inequitable arrangement which makes of the majority slaves provided with these primary wants and necessities and ministering

under compulsion to a few who rise higher and satisfy larger wants. These are the wants of the vital instincts, called in our philosophy the *prāṇa koṣa*, which go beyond and dominate the mere animal wants, simple, coarse and undiscriminating, shared by us with the lower creation. It is these vital wants, the hunger for wealth, luxury, beautiful women, rich foods and drinks, which disturbed the first low but perfect economy of society and made the institution of private property, with its huge train of evils, inequality, injustice, violence, fraud, civil commotion and hatred, class selfishness, family selfishness, and personal selfishness, an inevitable necessity of human progress. The Mother of All works through evil as well as good, and through temporary evil she brings

about a better and lasting good. These disturbances were complicated by the heightening of the primitive animal emotions into more intense and complex forms. Love, hatred, vindictiveness, anger, attachment, jealousy and the host of similar passions,—the *citta* or mind-stuff suffused by the vital wants of the *prāṇa*, that which the Europeans call the heart—ceased to be communal in their application and, as personal wants, clamoured for separate satisfaction. It is for the satisfaction of the vital and emotional needs of humanity that modern nations and societies exist, that commerce grows and Science ministers to human luxury and convenience. But for these new wants, the establishment of private property, first in the clan or family, then in the individual, the

institution of slavery and other necessary devices, the modern world would never have come into existence; for the satisfaction of the primary economic wants and bodily necessities would never have carried us beyond the small commune or tribe. But these primary wants and necessities have to be satisfied and satisfied universally, or society becomes diseased and states convulsed with sedition and revolution.

The old arrangement of a mass of slaves well fed and provided and a select class or classes enjoying in greater or less quantity the higher wants of humanity broke down in the mediaeval ages, because the heart began to develop too powerfully in humanity and, under the influence of philosophy, ethics and religion, began

to spread its claim beyond the person, the class, the family, the clan to the nation and to humanity or to all creation. A temporary makeshift was invented to replace slavery, called free labour, by which men were paid and bribed to accept voluntarily the position of slaves, contenting themselves with the coarse satisfaction of the animal necessities and in return providing by their labour the higher wants of their masters now called superiors or higher classes. This also has become a solution which will no longer serve. The whole of humanity now demands not merely the satisfaction of the body, the *anna*, but the satisfaction also of the *prāṇa* and the *citta*, the vital and emotional desires. Wealth, luxury, enjoyment for oneself and those dear to us, participation in the

satisfaction of national wealth, pride, lordship, rivalry, war, alliance, peace, once the privilege of the few, the higher classes, of prince, burgess and noble are now claimed by all humanity. Political, social and economic liberty and equality, two things difficult to harmonise, must now be conceded to all men and harmonised as well as the present development of humanity will allow. It is this claim that arose, red with fury and blinded with blood, in the French Revolution. This is Democracy, this Socialism, this Anarchism; and, however fiercely the privileged and propertied classes may rage, curse and denounce these fore-runners of Demogorgon, they can only temporarily resist. Their interests may be hoary and venerable with the sanction of the ages, but the future is

mightier than the past and evolution proceeds relentlessly in its course trampling to pieces all that it no longer needs. Those who fight against her fight against the will of God, against a decree written from of old, and are already defeated and slain in the *kāraṇ jagat*, the world of types and causes where Nature fixes everything before she works it out in the visible world. *Nihataḥ pūrvameva.*

The mass of humanity has not risen beyond the bodily needs, the vital desires, the emotions and the current of thought-sensations created by these lower strata. This current of thought-sensations is called in Hindu philosophy the *manas* or mind, it is the highest to which all but a few of the animals can rise, and it is the highest

function that the mass of mankind has thoroughly perfected. Beyond the *manas* is the *buddhi*, or thought proper, which, when perfected, is independent of the desires, the claims of the body and the interference of the emotions. But only a minority of men have developed this organ, much less perfected it. Only great thinkers in their hours of thought are able to use this organ independently of the lower strata, and even they are besieged by the latter in their ordinary life and their best thought suffers continually from these lower intrusions. Only developed Yogins have a *viśuddha buddhi*, a thought-organ cleared of the interference of the lower strata by *cittaśuddhi* or purification of the *citta*, the mind-stuff, from the *prāṇa* full of animal, vital and emotional

disturbances. With most men the *buddhi* is full of *manas* and the *manas* of the lower strata. The majority of mankind do not think, they have only thought-sensations; a large minority think confusedly, mixing up desires, predilections, passions, prejudgments, old associations and prejudices with pure and disinterested thought. Only a few, the rare aristocrats of the earth, can really and truly think. That is now the true aristocracy, not the aristocracy of the body and birth, not the aristocracy of vital superiority, wealth, pride and luxury, not the aristocracy of higher emotions, courage, energy, successful political instinct and the habit of mastery and rule,—though these latter cannot be neglected,—but the aristocracy of knowledge, undisturbed insight and intellectual ability.

It emerges, though it has not yet emerged, and in any future arrangement of human society this natural inequality will play an important part.

Above the *buddhi* are other faculties which are now broadly included in the term spirituality. This body of faculties is still rarer and more imperfectly developed even in the highest than the thought-organ. Most men mistake intellectuality, imaginative inspiration or emotional fervour for spirituality, but this is a much higher function, the highest of all, of which all the others are coverings and veils. Here we get to the fountain, the source to which we return, the goal of human evolution. But although spirituality has often entered into humanity in great waves, it has done

so merely to create a temporary impetus and retire into the souls of a few, leaving only its coverings and shadows behind to compose and inform the thing which is usually called religion. Meanwhile the thought is the highest man has really attained and it is by the thought that the old society has been broken down. And the thought is composed of two separate sides, judgment or reason and imagination, both of which are necessary to perfect ideation. It is by science, philosophy and criticism on the one side, by art, poetry and idealism on the other, that the old state of humanity has been undermined and is now collapsing, and the foundations have been laid for the new. Of these science, philosophy and criticism have established their use to the mass of

humanity by ministering to the luxury, comfort and convenience which all men desire and arming them with justification in the confused struggle of passions, interests, cravings and aspirations which are now working with solvent and corrosive effect throughout the world. The value of the other side, more subtle and profound, has been clouded to the mass of men by the less visible and sensational character of its workings.

II

The activity of human thought divides itself broadly into two groups of functions, those of the right hand, contemplation, creation, imagination, the centres that see the truth, and those of the left hand, criticism, reasoning, discrimination, inquiry, the centres that judge the truth when it is seen. In education the latter are fostered by scientific and manual training, but the only quality of the right hand that this education fosters is observation. For this reason a purely scientific education tends to make thought keen and clear-sighted within

certain limits, but narrow, hard and cold. Even in his own sphere the man without any training of the right hand can only progress in a settled groove; he cannot broaden the base of human culture or enlarge the bounds of science. Tennyson describes him as an eye well practised in Nature, a spirit bounded and poor, and the description is just. But a cultivated eye without a cultivated spirit makes by no means the highest type of man. It is precisely the cultivation of the spirit that is the object of what is well called a liberal education, and the pursuits best calculated to cultivate the growth of the spirit are language, literature, the Arts, music, painting, sculpture or the study of these, philosophy, religion, history, the study and under-

standing of man through his works and of Nature and man through the interpretative as well as through the analytic faculties. These are the pursuits which belong to the intellectual activities of the right hand, and while the importance of most of these will be acknowledged, there is a tendency to ignore Art and poetry as mere refinements, luxuries of the rich and leisurely rather than things that are necessary to the mass of men or useful to life. This is largely due to the misuse of these great instruments by the luxurious few who held the world and its good things in their hands in the intermediate period of human progress. But the aesthetic faculties entering into the enjoyment of the world and the satisfaction of the vital instincts, the love of the

beautiful in men and women, in food, in things, in articles of use and articles of pleasure, have done more than anything else to raise man from the beast, to refine and purge his passions, to ennoble his emotions and to lead him up through the heart and the imagination to the state of the intellectual man. That which has helped man upward, must be preserved in order that he may not sink below the level he has attained. For man intellectually developed, mighty in scientific knowledge and the mastery of gross and subtle nature, using the elements as his servants and the world as his footstool, but undeveloped in heart and spirit, becomes only an inferior kind of *Asura* using the powers of a demigod to satisfy the nature of an animal. According to dim traditions

and memories of the old world, of such a nature was the civilisation of old Atlantis, submerged beneath the Ocean when its greatness and its wickedness became too heavy a load for the earth to bear, and our own legends of the *Asuras* represent a similar consciousness of a great but abortive development in humanity.

The first and lowest use of Art is the purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual. By speaking of the aesthetic use as the lowest, we do not wish to imply that it is not of immense value to humanity, but simply to assign to it its comparative value in relation to the higher uses. The aesthetic is of immense importance and until it has done its

work, mankind is not really fitted to make full use of Art on the higher planes of human development. Aristotle assigns a high value to tragedy because of its purifying force. He describes its effect as *katharsis*, a sacramental word of the Greek mysteries, which, in the secret discipline of the ancient Greek *Tāntrics*, answered precisely to our *cittaśuddhi*, the purification of the *citta* or mass of established ideas, feelings and actional habits in a man either by *saṁyama*, rejection, or by *bhoga*, satisfaction, or by both. Aristotle was speaking of the purification of feelings, passions and emotions in the heart through imaginative treatment in poetry but the truth the idea contains is of much wider application and constitutes the justification of the

aesthetic side of art. It purifies by beauty. The beautiful and the good are held by many thinkers to be the same and, though the idea may be wrongly stated, it is, when put from the right standpoint, not only a truth but the fundamental truth of existence. According to our own philosophy the whole world came out of *ānanda* and returns into *ānanda,* and the triple term in which *ānanda* may be stated is Joy, Love, Beauty. To see divine beauty in the whole world, man, life, nature, to love that which we have seen and to have pure unalloyed bliss in that love and that beauty is the appointed road by which mankind as a race must climb to God. That is the reaching to *Vidyā* through *Avidyā,* to the One Pure and Divine through the manifold

manifestation of Him, of which the Upanishad repeatedly speaks. But the bliss must be pure and unalloyed, unalloyed by self-regarding emotions, unalloyed by pain and evil. The sense of good and bad, beautiful and unbeautiful, which afflicts our understanding and our senses, must be replaced by *akhaṇḍa rasa*, undifferentiated and unabridged delight in the delightfulness of things, before the highest can be reached. On the way to this goal full use must be made of the lower and abridged sense of beauty which seeks to replace the less beautiful by the more, the lower by the higher, the mean by the noble.

At a certain stage of human development the aesthetic sense is of

infinite value in this direction. It raises and purifies conduct by instilling a distaste for the coarse desires and passions of the savage, for the rough, uncouth and excessive in action and manner, and restraining both feeling and action by a striving after the decent, the beautiful, the fit and seemly which received its highest expression in the manners of cultivated European society, the elaborate ceremonious life of the Confucian, the careful *ācār* and etiquette of Hinduism. At the present stage of progress this element is losing much of its once all-important value and, when overstressed, tends to hamper a higher development by the obstruction of soulless ceremony and formalism. Its great use was to discipline the savage animal instincts of

the body, the vital instincts and the lower feelings in the heart. Its disadvantage to progress is that it tends to trammel the play both of the higher feelings of the heart and the workings of originality in thought. Born originally of a seeking after beauty, it degenerates into an attachment to form, to exterior uniformity, to precedent, to dead authority. In the future development of humanity it must be given a much lower place than in the past. Its limits must be recognised and the demands of a higher truth, sincerity and freedom of thought and feeling must be given priority. Mankind is apt to bind itself by attachment to the means of its past progress forgetful of the aim. The bondage to formulas has to be outgrown, and in this again it is the sense of a

higher beauty and fitness which will be most powerful to correct the lower. The art of life must be understood in more magnificent terms and must subordinate its more formal elements to the service of the master civilisers, Love and Thought.

III

The work of purifying conduct through outward form and habitual and seemly regulation of expression, manner and action is the lowest of the many services which the artistic sense has done to humanity, and yet how wide is the field it covers and how important and indispensable have its workings been to the progress of civilisation! A still more important and indispensable activity of the sense of beauty is the powerful help it has given to the formation of morality. We do not ordinarily recognise how

largely our sense of virtue is a sense of the beautiful in conduct and our sense of sin a sense of ugliness and deformity in conduct. It may easily be recognised in the lower and more physical workings, as for instance in the shuddering recoil from cruelty, blood, torture as things intolerably hideous to sight and imagination or in the aesthetic disgust at sensual excesses and the strong sense, awakened by this disgust, of the charm of purity and the beauty of virginity. This latter feeling was extremely active in the imagination of the Greeks and other nations not noted for a high standard in conduct, and it was purely aesthetic in its roots. Pity again is largely a vital instinct in the ordinary man associated with *jugupsa*, the loathing for

the hideousness of its opposite, *ghṛṇā*, disgust at the sordidness and brutality of cruelty, hardness and selfishness as well as at the ugliness of their actions, so that a common word for cruel in the Sanskrit language is *nirghṛṇā*, the man without disgust or loathing, and the word *ghṛṇā* approximates in use to *kṛpā*, the lower or vital kind of pity. But even on a higher plane the sense of virtue is very largely aesthetic and, even when it emerges from the aesthetic stage, must always call the sense of the beautiful to its support if it is to be safe from the revolt against it of one of the most deep-seated of human instincts. We can see the largeness of this element if we study the ideas of the Greeks, who never got beyond the aesthetic stage of morality.

There were four gradations in Greek ethical thought,—the *euprepes*, that which is seemly or outwardly decorous; the *dikaion*, that which is in accordance with *dike* or *nomos*, the law, custom and standard of humanity based on the sense of fitness and on the codified or uncodified mass of precedents in which that sense has been expressed in general conduct, —in other words the just or lawful; thirdly, the *agathon*, the good, based partly on the seemly and partly on the just and lawful, and reaching towards the purely beautiful; then final and supreme, the *kalon*, that which is purely beautiful, the supreme standard. The most remarkable part of Aristotle's moral system is that in which he classifies the parts of conduct not according to our idea

of virtue and sin, *pāpa* and *puṇya*, but by a purely aesthetic standard, the excess, defect and golden, in other words correct and beautiful, mean of qualities. The Greeks' view of life was imperfect even from the standpoint of beauty, not only because the idea of beauty was not sufficiently catholic and too much attached to a fastidious purity of form and outline and restraint, but because they were deficient in love. God as beauty, Srikrishna in Brindavan, *Shyāmsundara*, is not only Beauty, He is also Love, and without perfect love there cannot be perfect beauty, and without perfect beauty there cannot be perfect delight. The aesthetic motive in conduct limits and must be exceeded in order that humanity may rise. Therefore it was

that the Greek mould had to be broken and humanity even revolted for a time against beauty. The *agathon*, the good, had to be released for a time from the bondage of the *kalon*, the aesthetic sense of beauty, just as it is now struggling to deliver itself from the bondage of the *euprepes* and the *dikaion*, mere decorousness, mere custom, mere social law and rule. The excess of this anti-aesthetic tendency is visible in Puritanism and the baser forms of asceticism. The progress of ethics in Europe has been largely a struggle between the Greek sense of aesthetic beauty and the Christian sense of a higher good marred on the one side by formalism, on the other by an unlovely asceticism. The association of the latter with virtue has largely

driven the sense of beauty to the side of vice. The good must not be subordinated to the aesthetic sense, but it must be beautiful and delightful, or to that extent it ceases to be good. The object of existence is not the practice of virtue for its own sake but *ānanda*, delight, and progress consists not in rejecting beauty and delight, but in rising from the lower to the higher, the less complete to the more complete beauty and to delight.

The third activity of aesthetic faculty, higher than the two already described, the highest activity of the artistic sense before it rises to the plane of the intellect, is the direct purifying of the emotions. This is the *katharsis* of which Aristotle spoke.

The sense of pleasure and delight in the emotional aspects of life and action, this is the poetry of life, just as the regulating and beautiful arrangement of character and action is the art of life. We have seen how the latter purifies, but the purifying force of the former is still more potent for good. Our life is largely made up of the eight *rasas*. The movements of the heart in its enjoyment of action, its own and that of others, may either be directed downwards, as is the case with the animals and animal men, to the mere satisfaction of the ten sense-organs and the vital desires which make instruments of the senses in the average sensual man, or they may work for the satisfaction of the heart itself in a predominatingly emotional enjoyment of life, or they may

be directed upwards through the medium of the intellect, rational and intuitional, to attainment of delight through the seizing on the source of all delight, the Spirit, the *satyam, sundaram, ānandam* who is beyond and around, the source and the basis of all this world-wide activity, evolution and progress. When the heart works for itself, then it enjoys the poetry of life, the delight of emotions, the wonder, pathos, beauty, enjoyableness, lovableness, calm, serenity, clarity and also the grandeur, heroism, passion, fury, terror and horror of life, of man, of Nature, of the phenomenal manifestation of God. This is not the highest, but it is higher than the animal, vital and externally aesthetic developments. The large part it plays in life is obvious, but in

life it is hampered by the demands of body and the vital passions. Here comes in the first mighty utility, the triumphant activity of the most energetic forms of art and poetry. They provide a field in which these pressing claims of the animal can be excluded and the emotions, working disinterestedly for the satisfaction of the heart and the imagination alone, can do the work of *katharsis*, emotional purification, of which Aristotle spoke. *Cittaśuddhi*, the purification of the heart, is the appointed road by which man arrives at his higher fulfilment, and, if it can be shown that poetry and art are powerful agents towards that end, their supreme importance is established. They are that, and more than that. It is only one of the great uses of these things which

men nowadays are inclined to regard as mere ornaments of life and therefore of secondary importance.

IV

We now come to the kernel of the subject, the place of art in the evolution of the race and its value in the education and actual life of a nation. The first question is whether the sense of the beautiful has any effect on the life of a nation. It is obvious, from what we have already written, that the manners, the social culture and the restraint in action and expression which are so large a part of national prestige and dignity and make a nation admired like the French, loved like the Irish or respected like the higher-class English, are based essen-

tially on the sense of form and beauty, of what is correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair to the eye and pleasing to the imagination. The absence of these qualities is a source of national weakness. The rudeness, coarseness and vulgar violence of the less cultured Englishman, the over-bearing brusqueness and selfishness of the Prussian have greatly hampered those powerful nations in their dealings with foreigners, dependencies and even their own friends, allies, colonies. We all know what a large share the manner and ordinary conduct of the average and of the vulgar Anglo-Indian has had in bringing about the revolt of the Indian, accustomed through ages to courtesy, dignity and the amenities of an equal intercourse, against the mastery of an obviously

coarse and selfish community. Now the sense of form and beauty, the correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair and pleasing is an artistic sense and can best be fostered in a nation by artistic culture of the perceptions and sensibilities. It is noteworthy that the two great nations who are most hampered by the defect of these qualities in action are also the least imaginative, poetic and artistic in Europe. It is the South German who contributes the art, poetry and music of Germany, the Celt and Norman who produce great poets and a few great artists in England without altering the characteristics of the dominant Saxon. Music is even more powerful in this direction than Art and by the perfect expression of harmony insensibly steeps the man in it. And it

is noticeable that England has hardly produced a single musician worth the name. Plato in his Republic has dwelt with extraordinary emphasis on the importance of music in education; as is the music to which a people is accustomed, so, he says in effect, is the character of that people. The importance of painting and sculpture is hardly less. The mind is profoundly influenced by what it sees and, if the eye is trained from the days of childhood to the contemplation and understanding of beauty, harmony and just arrangement in line and colour, the tastes, habits and character will be insensibly trained to follow a similar law of beauty, harmony and just arrangement in the life of the adult man. This was the great importance of the universal proficiency in the

arts and crafts or the appreciation of them which was prevalent in ancient Greece, in certain European ages, in Japan and in the better days of our own history. Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified.

A similar result is produced on the emotions by the study of beautiful or noble art. We have spoken of the purification of the heart, the *citta-śuddhi*, which Aristotle assigned as the essential office of poetry, and have pointed out that it is done in poetry

by the detached and disinterested enjoyment of the eight *rasas* or forms of emotional aestheticism which make up life, unalloyed by the disturbance of the lower self-regarding passions. Painting and sculpture work in the same direction by different means. Art sometimes uses the same means as poetry but cannot do it to the same extent because it has not the movement of poetry; it is fixed, still, it expresses only a given moment, a given point in space and cannot move freely through time and region. But it is precisely this stillness, this calm, this fixity which gives its separate value to Art. Poetry raises the emotions and gives each its separate delight. Art stills the emotions and teaches them the delight of a restrained and limited satisfaction,—this

indeed was the characteristic that the Greeks, a nation of artists far more artistic than poetic, tried to bring into their poetry. Music deepens the emotions and harmonises them with each other. Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious. These, therefore, are agents which cannot profitably be neglected by humanity on its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character. They are, when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilising forces.

V

The value of art in the training of intellectual faculty is also an important part of its utility. We have already indicated the double character of intellectual activity, divided between the imaginative, creative and sympathetic or comprehensive intellectual centres on the one side and the critical, analytic and penetrative on the other. The latter are best trained by science, criticism and observation, the former by art, poetry, music, literature and the sympathetic study of man and his creations. These make the mind quick to grasp at a

glance, subtle to distinguish shades, deep to reject shallow self-sufficiency, mobile, delicate, swift, intuitive. Art assists in this training by raising images in the mind which it has to understand not by analysis, but by self-identification with other minds; it is a powerful stimulator of sympathetic insight. Art is subtle and delicate, and it makes the mind also in its movements subtle and delicate. It is suggestive, and the intellect habituated to the appreciation of art is quick to catch suggestions, mastering not only, as the scientific mind does, that which is positive and on the surface, but that which leads to ever fresh widening and subtilising of knowledge and opens a door into the deeper secrets of inner nature where the positive instruments of science

cannot take the depth or measure. This supreme intellectual value of Art has never been sufficiently recognised. Men have made language, poetry, history, philosophy agents for the training of this side of intellectuality, necessary parts of a liberal education, but the immense educative force of music, painting and sculpture has not been duly recognised. They have been thought to be by-paths of the human mind, beautiful and interesting, but not necessary, therefore intended for the few. Yet the universal impulse to enjoy the beauty and attractiveness of sound, to look at and live among pictures, colours, forms ought to have warned mankind of the superficiality and ignorance of such a view of these eternal and important occupations of human mind. The impulse,

denied proper training and self-purification, has spent itself on the trivial, gaudy, sensuous, cheap or vulgar instead of helping man upward by its powerful aid in the evocation of what is best and highest in intellect as well as in character, emotion and the aesthetic enjoyment and regulation of life and manners. It is difficult to appreciate the waste and detriment involved in the low and debased level of enjoyment to which the artistic impulses are condemned in the majority of mankind.

But beyond and above this intellectual utility of Art, there is a higher use, the noblest of all, its service to the growth of spirituality in the race. European critics have dwelt on the close connection of the highest deve-

lopments of art with religion, and it is undoubtedly true that in Greece in Italy, in India, the greatest efflorescence of a national Art has been associated with the employment of the artistic genius to illustrate or adorn the thoughts and fancies or the temples and instruments of the national religion. This was not because Art is necessarily associated with the outward forms of religion, but because it was in the religion that men's spiritual aspirations centred themselves. Spirituality is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression. Spirituality is a single word expressive of three lines of human aspiration towards divine knowledge, divine love and joy, divine strength, and that will be the

highest and most perfect Art which, while satisfying the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality, as the best European Art satisfies these requirements, reaches beyond them and expresses inner spiritual truth, the deeper not obvious reality of things, the joy of God in the world and its beauty and desirableness and the manifestation of divine force and energy in phenomenal creation. This is what Indian Art alone attempted thoroughly and in the effort it often dispensed, either deliberately or from impatience, with the lower, yet not negligible perfections which the more material European demanded. Therefore Art has flowed in two separate

streams in Europe and Asia, so diverse that it is only now that the European aesthetic sense has so far trained itself as to begin to appreciate the artistic conventions, aims and traditions of Asia. Asia's future development will unite these two streams in one deep and grandiose flood of artistic self-expression perfecting the aesthetic evolution of humanity.

But if Art is to reach towards the highest, the Indian tendency must dominate. The spirit is that in which all the rest of the human being reposes, towards which it returns and the final self-revelation of which is the goal of humanity. Man becomes God, and all human activity reaches its highest and noblest when it succeeds in bringing body, heart and mind

into touch with spirit. Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance. So wonderfully has God made the world that a man using a simple combination of lines, an unpretentious harmony of colours, can raise this apparently insignificant medium to suggest absolute and profound truths with a perfection which language labours with difficulty to reach. What Nature is, what God is, what man is can be triumphantly revealed in stone or on canvas.

Behind a few figures, a few trees and rocks the supreme Intelligence, the supreme Imagination, the supreme Energy lurks, acts, feels, is, and, if the artist has the spiritual vision, he can see it and suggest

perfectly the great mysterious Life in its manifestations brooding in action, active in thought, energetic in stillness, creative in repose, full of a mastering intention in that which appears blind and unconscious. The great truths of religion, science, metaphysics, life, development, become concrete, emotional, universally intelligible and convincing in the hands of the master of plastic Art, and the soul of man, in the stage when it is rising from emotion to intellect, looks, receives the suggestion and is uplifted towards a higher development, a diviner knowledge.

So it is with the divine love and joy which pulsates throughout existence and is far superior to alloyed earthly pleasure. Catholic, perfect,

unmixed with repulsion, radiating through all things, the common no less than the high, the mean and shabby no less than the lofty and splendid, the terrible and the repulsive no less than the charming and attractive, it uplifts all, purifies all, turns all to love and delight and beauty. A little of this immortal nectar poured into a man's heart transfigures life and action. The whole flood of it pouring in would lift mankind to God. This too Art can seize on and suggest to the human soul, aiding it in its stormy and toilsome pilgrimage. In that pilgrimage it is the divine strength that supports. *Shakti*, Force, pouring through the universe supports its boundless activities, the frail and tremulous life of the rose no less

than the flaming motions of sun and star. To suggest the strength and virile unconquerable force of the divine Nature in man and in the outside world, its energy, its calm, its powerful inspiration, its august enthusiasm, its wildness, greatness, attractiveness, to breathe that into man's soul and gradually mould the finite into the image of the Infinite is another spiritual utility of Art. This is its loftiest function, its fullest consummation, its most perfect privilege.

VI

The enormous value of Art to human evolution has been made sufficiently apparent from the analysis, incomplete in itself, which we have attempted. We have also incidentally pointed out its value as a factor in education. It is obvious that no nation can afford to neglect an element of such high importance to the culture of its people or the training of some of the higher intellectual, moral and aesthetic faculties in the young. The system of education which, instead of keeping artistic training apart as a privilege for a few specialists, frankly

introduces it as a part of culture no less necessary than literature or science, will have taken a great step forward in the perfection of national education and the general diffusion of a broad-based human culture. It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual masterpieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce

and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy. A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realises the fullness of the expanding Spirit in itself.

In the system of National education that was inaugurated in Bengal, a beginning was made by the importance attached to drawing and clay-modelling as elements of manual training. But the absence of an artistic ideal, the misconception of the true aim of manual training, the imperative financial needs of these

struggling institutions making for a predominant commercial aim in the education given, the mastery of English ideas, English methods and English predilections in the so-called national education rendered nugatory the initial advantage. The students had faculty, but the teaching given them would waste and misuse the faculty. The nation and the individual can gain nothing by turning out figures in clay which faithfully copy the vulgarity and ugliness of English commercial production or by multiplying mere copies of men or things. A free and active imaging of form and hue within oneself, a free and self-trained hand reproducing with instinctive success not the form and measurement of things seen outside, for that is a smaller capacity

easily mastered, but the inward vision of the relation and truth of things, an eye quick to note and distinguish, sensitive to design and to harmony in colour, these are the faculties that have to be evoked and the formal and mechanical English method is useless for this purpose.

In India the revival of a truly national Art is already an accomplished fact and the masterpieces of the school can already challenge comparison with the best work of other countries. Under such circumstances it is unpardonable that the crude formal teaching of English schools and the vulgar commercial aims and methods of the West should subsist in our midst. The country has yet to evolve a system of education which

shall be really national. The taint of Occidental ideals and alien and unsuitable methods has to be purged out of our minds, and nowhere more than in the teaching which should be the foundation of intellectual and aesthetic renovation. The spirit of old Indian Art must be revived, the inspiration and directness of vision which even now subsists among the possessors of the ancient traditions, the inborn skill and taste of the race, the dexterity of the Indian hand and the intuitive gaze of the Indian eye must be recovered and the whole nation lifted again to the high level of the ancient culture—and higher.

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